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The meaning of integration and some changes which should occur in American life are examined. The defamation of the Negro in the printed word, novels, motion pictures, and particularly in school textbooks is illustrated. Many textbooks omit Negro contributions to American life and nullify children's aspirations by relegating Negroes to a passive role in life. Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, Jackie Robinson, and Ralph Bunche are usually the only Negroes mentioned in textbooks. Educators should not only develop supplementary materials, but should also use their power and positions to get the truth written into textbooks.

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INTEGRATION IS NOT THE ISSUE

Edwina Chavers Johnson

The author is editor of Guide for Teachers on Contributions of the Afro-American to the American Culture. *C, 1965, Edwina Chavers Johnson.*

No matter how many organizations or persons in positions of influence may label the current American social issue "integration," that is *not* the issue. The issue is *freedom*. To enunciate and clarify this freedom, we must begin with basic civil rights. 1) Freedom from the denial of a citizen's right to vote. 2) Freedom from denial of a citizen's right to use public facilities (and this has not anything to do with an imaginary kind of "Mrs. Murphy's boarding house"). 3) Freedom from humiliation at the sight of a sign "for colored". 4) Freedom from exclusion of job opportunity. 5) Freedom from defamation in the printed word in textbooks and reference materials used by schools. It is this last freedom we shall examine presently.

Integration has no meaning for the person of African descent in America. We have in reality been "integrated" in the American framework for three hundred and fifty years. This "integration" in America is comparable to the "assimilation" of the Africans of Angola in the Portuguese sense; is comparable to the "identity of the African in former French West African colonies; is comparable to the "education for indirect rule" of the African in former British colonies. The role of black people throughout the world has been that of subordinate, lesser creature, subservient to the whites. Freedom does not imply integration, nor assimilation, nor identity in the European sense. The integration of the African in American life has been sustained through a caste system, based upon economics. There will have to be found new ways of describing avenues of clarification if educators are going to keep abreast of social changes.

Integration, if it would have any meaning at all, would be the end result of several major changes: desegregation, human dignity for every person, mutual respect—group to group and person to person, freedom in every aspect of American life. If educators become earnestly involved in new approaches to the social challenge, it is doubtful that the word "integration" would be used at all. A school where Americans of all complexions learn and pursue vocational interests on an equal basis is a desegregated school, not an integrated one. Integration has various emotional overtones which perpetuate the myth that Afro-Americans are seeking to invade white schools, or white premises. Integration may even evoke emotional reactions which reduce the democratizing of school systems—its meaning is southern and rather sensual. If there is to be meaningful educational dialogue on desegregation of schools, old cliches and phrases will have to be replaced by newer, more vital words. The suggestion here is that "integration" is old, obselete, emotional, and horribly misleading. Let us consider the textbook—the key to future "open minds."

> The central social condition under which the school boycott movement is operating—and outside of which it cannot be understood—is that our public educational system is compulsively preparing the masses of poor people, and most Negroes are poor, to be poor for the rest of their lives.
>
> —Lawrence Landry,
> October 9, 1964

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During National Library Week, April 21-27, 1963, President Kennedy stated: "Our young people constitute the greatest resource our country has—and books are the nourishment essential to their intellectual growth into thoughtful and informed citizens." This writer believes that if our young people can read unbiased textbooks, young people will grow into unbiased adults. If the European descendant learns of non-European contributions to world civilizations he will be less biased and more cooperative. If the African descendant learns of his forefather's contributions, he will see his own role as a builder of this country and become more earnest in his pursuit of life.

During 1963-1964 there was much discussion about "what the Negro wants." He wants *freedom*, for himself, for his children, for future generations in America. It is almost impossible to accept the idea that white people, so-called "superior" people, cannot comprehend such a simple fact. Some of the inability on the part of white people to understand the desire and demands and efforts for freedom may be due to the putrid, dreadful novels and motion pictures which repeat and reinforce the eternal stereotype of Africa and the African descendant in America: The cannibal, the savage, the "primitive" in *the dark continent*—the happy slave, the devoted Uncle Tom. The most heinous offense to black people is printed in textbooks for young children to use as hallmarks of history! The same cannibal; savage; happy slave; "incomplete human" is presented. Lies. Lies. Lies. And we pay for them with our tax dollar. And educators are extremely silent about it. And educators very often write the books which we pay for with our tax dollars.

Do not wonder that the Afro-American child appears to achieve so poorly academically—wonder that they are not all in the asylum due to mental torture that is a result of reading the textbooks which tell them they are interior, that their forefathers never created, protected, beautified or defended—neither in Africa nor in America. Wonder, instead, how a child can be inspired to learn when he is taught as a toddler, through, television, comics, picture books, that people like himself don't really do anything that is important in life. It could very well be a fact that Afro-American children not only feel themselves to be without a role in world history or the American heritage, but feel themselves to be relegated to the "audience" role in life; when they are as young as six or seven! It is quite possible that whatever ideas he has as a young child in the earliest grades are nullified without the assistance of articulation from any adult. The book has nullified his aspirations! James Baldwin has written with such clarity and force about the degradation imposed upon black children, yet educators are still busy with programs for "deprived" children—as if Baldwin has not spelled out frankly that it is society, white society, that degrades the black child; and separates him from the rest of humanity. White children have been deprived, black children have been de-humanized. White children have been deprived of the right to know that they are not superior and are not entitled to special place, rank, or choice. White children have been deprived of the right to know world history in proper perspective—and specifically American history. The first slaves and servants in this country were white, not black. The first blacks in this country were not slaves and servants but explorers. White children have been deprived and black children have been dehumanized through the textbook because the textbook does not enunciate the truth regarding the black explorers, inventors, military heroes, scientists who built, defended and beautified this land. And we pay for this deprivation with our tax dollar every year. If educators in positions

> Educational problems cannot be considered in isolation from the aspirations of the great bodies of men and women for whose sake alone it is that educational problems are worth considering at all.
>
> —Richard H. Tawney, 1914

of power do not begin to air the textbook on television and in public debate, if educators in positions of power do not use their ability to bring pressure, and they can, on publishing houses, then educators are also assisting in this deprivation and dehumanization.

We are concerned here with correction of the printed word—not "integration of textbooks." We are concerned here with getting the truth printed so that white children and black children will be able to get "quality" education. We are concerned here with enabling teachers to work with democratic textbooks—which would enumerate contributions to every field of endeavor in American life, the Afro-American, the Polish-American, the Chinese-American and all the other Americans of various descents—and not the Anglo-American alone. There is usually a reference to national or cultural origin of Americans of European descent, often a rather romantic sketch of the person's family background which produced an "American of outstanding ability." Aside from Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver, (who apparently had no Old World roots or forefathers but grew on some plantation in the South) and perhaps Jackie Robinson or Ralph Bunche, textbooks tell children that less than six persons of African descent made any contribution to American life. The 5,000 men in the Revolutionary war are not mentioned; the 200,000 in the Civil War are not described. These are two important military facts which all children should be taught. Martin Luther King writes in his book *Why We Can't Wait* that, "the young boy in Harlem and the young girl in Birmingham know that Negroes were with George Washington at Valley Forge; that the first American to shed blood in the revolution which freed this country from British oppression was . . . Crispus Attucks, that Benjamin Banneker helped lay out Washington, D.C." I realize that this young boy in Harlem and the young girl in Birmingham of whom Dr. King writes in the introduction to his book are "representative references" in a description of current events, yet I wish to suggest that individual names might well be used—so rare are the boys and girls of African descent who know these few facts of their own heritage.

Let us not be concerned with any special kind of volumes on "Negro History"—Carter G. Woodson began that fifty odd years ago in order to combat untruths and distortions in textbooks. Let us be concerned with the books which are used in public schools and are paid for with our tax dollars. Let us not say "develop supplementary materials"—Afro-Americans have been supplements in America for three hundred years. Let us challenge educators everywhere to use their power and organizations of power and their positions as writers of textbooks to get the truth written into school books.

Here is a new front to attack. This would not add to a child's school day (as busing would—even though white children have been bused to school for generations with no complaint). This would not call for more special teachers (as many "frill programs" do). This would not call for engineers to build new "complexes" in which to house children from many communities together. This would simply mean that the false "white superiority" would be shown to be false and the degradation of black children via the printed word would come to an end. If educators cannot correct the textbooks *now*—then educators are assisting those who wish to perpetuate American "Apartheid."

Importantly, then, we might discard the term "integration" and substitute the word "freedom." Certainly in regard to textbooks the term "integration" is misused. Corrected textbooks that spell out the African's role in building America, or more properly, the Afro-American's role (for so many are now of mixed blood due to "integration" in the ante-bellum days) would mean freedom from defamation in public school textbooks for children of African descent. It can be done. If educators in power positions wish, it will be done.